

Working With Neighbors Is Your Best Defense Against Wildfires

(NAPSA)—A key lesson from the home and property losses from wildfires we've seen in recent years is that there are preventive actions people can take to protect their homes long before a fire starts. Programs such as Firewise Communities are encouraging residents to work with their neighbors for the best defense.

"After you have made your home as safe as you can, working with your neighbors is your best insurance against wildfire loss," said Judith Leraas Cook, project manager for the Firewise Communities/USA recognition program. "Communities around the country are engaging in fire mitigation projects that are readying their greenbelts, common areas and roadways should wildfire threaten the community."

In addition to reduced risk, the benefits to working as a community include shared costs, increased sense of community and access to additional information resources, according to Leraas Cook. Many are extremely pleased with the aesthetic results of their work. In some cases, communities may also be eligible for state and federal grants.

There is no guarantee where and when a wildfire will happen, but communities that work together to reduce their risk in advance will stand a much better chance of withstanding a fire when it does occur.

Examples of Firewise projects include:



Residents can work together with neighbors and local fire staff to prepare for wildfires.

- Hosting a "chipping day" for residents to remove excess vegetation from their property and community property.
- Holding a wildfire preparedness day that provides information about proper landscape and construction choices, introduces local fire staff and distributes safety information.
- Enlisting volunteers in a fuel-removal project.
- Enlisting local fire staff to conduct a wildfire hazard overview at a community meeting.
- Distributing homeowner tips at community festivals and in community newsletters.

Communities involved in wildfire mitigation projects can apply for Firewise Communities/USA status. After meeting program criteria, residents have access to additional information resources and the opportunity to network with more than 350 communities across the United States.

For information, visit www.firewise.org/usa.